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The Unchanging Christian Message.

A

SERMON

PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION

OF

REV. ALFRED PORTER PUTNAM,

AS

MINISTER OF THE MT. PLEASANT CHURCH IN ROXBURY,

DECEMBER 19, 1855.

BY GEORGE W. BRIGGS,

MINISTER OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN SALEM.

BOSTON:

CROSBY, NICHOLS, & COMPANY,

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NOTE. — It is to be regretted that copies of all the other parts of these services could not be obtained to be published with the Sermon. Having failed to procure the Address to the People, and the Charge to the Pastor, we are obliged to issue the pamphlet without them.

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SERMON.

MARK x. 21. — "THEN JESUS, BEHOLDING HIM, LOVED HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, ONE THING THOU LACKEST: GO, SELL WHATSOEVER THOU HAST, AND GIVE TO THE POOR; AND COME, TAKE UP THE CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME."

IT is a significant fact, that some of the severest sentences in the Gospels are applied to characters which possess actual graces of feeling and of life. Jesus did not come to teach the self-evident truth, that morally abandoned men are sinners. Open vice, indeed, appears doubly shameless in his presence. In one sense, it may be said that it is his peculiar mission to speak to the prodigal, — to call him back, penitent, redeemed, to his father's house. But it is quite as necessary to convict men as to convert; and, therefore, he has another mission which is of equal consequence. He aims to instruct and stimulate the conscience until it can detect radical defects in previously unquestioned forms of character, and judge life by divine standards. The young man to whom the text refers had kept many of the commandments. In his earnestness to see Jesus, he ran to overtake him, and kneeled at his feet. Jesus loved him for

his enthusiasm, and for the graces of his character. But, when his heart was probed, he went away grieved, banished by a conscious dissimilarity of spirit from the Redeemer's side. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Dives is not represented as a man of shameless sensuality: he was luxurious and self-indulgent. Clad in his purple robe, and seated at his sumptuous table, he forgot the beggar at his gate, and left him to the compassion of the dogs. Mere indifference to human wants amidst the delights of self-indulgence — a moral state which is matched in countless homes to-day — was gradually wakened into a remorse which became a quenchless fire. Those who are condemned in Christ's picture of the judgment are not criminals according to human laws or human standards. They had not dreamed of their deficiencies until they stood before the judgment-seat; they had not recognized the Lord himself in the person of their suffering brother; and had neglected to minister to the poor, the prisoner, the bound. It is not only the shameless criminals, but those who are indifferent to a brother's welfare, though never committing atrocious deeds, that stand at the left hand of the Judge.

The simple but significant services of ordination to a Christian ministry, in the midst of social refinement, of intellectual culture, of so much apparent moral progress, suggest the questions, How does Christianity confront the world's civilization, even in its noblest and purest forms? What message does the gospel bring to human homes and human hearts, where men are encompassed by its restraining and hallowing

influences, even from their birth, and grow up in obedience to so many of its commandments? Is this Christian ministry essentially modified by the external Christianization of society? or is it like Christ himself, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"?

It is the grand peculiarity of Jesus, that he judges men by their principles and motives, rather than by their deeds. He places little value upon the outward differences of character which seem to separate them, but points to the unity of principle which may exist beneath these apparent differences. How shall we illustrate this comprehensive spiritual classification? We look at differences of customs, color, race, until we become blind to the truth of man's universal brotherhood. Jesus points to the living heart which God has fashioned alike in all; to the same passions, the same affections; the same spiritual nature, with its dread yet divine gift of conscience, with its capacity for fellowship with the eternal Father, — until these radiant proofs of moral brotherhood banish the memory of superficial differences. These bonds of union in the soul itself form an imperishable chain, encircling us all alike, and binding us as one spiritual family to one Father's throne. Jesus classifies human character with the same comprehensiveness. We look at conspicuous acts of virtue, at the cross of sacrifice raised before the world, at munificent charities, until they seem proofs of pre-eminent excellence. Jesus points also to the secret closets where lowly piety retreats for prayer; to the crucified will in humble, Christian men, which only

needs the call of circumstances to take up the martyr's cross; to the philanthropy which has no silver nor gold to bestow, but which flows out in sympathy and tears and prayers. Through a moral unity, those who possess this unconspicuous virtue will sit down together with Abraham and Isaac, with patriarchs and apostles, in the higher fellowship of souls, and reign with them in the kingdom of God. Notwithstanding lingering frailties and individual imperfections, they are all clothed with the true wedding garment. And the same comprehensive classification which will emancipate the world by demonstrating the brotherhood of men, which confirms the hope of heaven by establishing the brotherhood of saints, must be maintained when the picture is reversed. We look at gross acts of inhumanity, at crimes which shock God and man. Jesus points also to the inherent principle of evil in every unconsecrated heart, to the lurking selfishness which postpones truth and conscience to desire and passion; and if men cannot renounce themselves at the call of duty, if they cannot take up their cross to follow, he comprehends them all in one great brotherhood, whose moral unity is as clear, as indisputable, as that which exists in the brotherhood of saints.

Here the objection may be made, that such a broad classification is undiscriminating, and therefore unjust. Men are unprepared and unwilling to admit the brotherhood of sinners, though they claim the same argument to prove the brotherhood of saints. They speak of a thousand individual distinctions of character,

which, they say, render such a general classification impossible, if not absurd. But the classifications of the gospel are not made without discrimination. Jesus was not undiscriminating when he condemned the young man who had kept so many of the commandments. *We* are undiscriminating when we do not detect the unity of heart beneath differences in conduct. Is it the form which selfishness assumes that condemns it before God? Is the grossness or the gracefulness of its manifestations the basis of decision when it is tried by the love of Calvary? The stream has many changing aspects. Now it rushes on in one deep, dark flood; and now it spreads into a placid lake; and now it leaps and sparkles in the sunbeams, and is robed in rainbows: but it is the selfsame stream beneath every varied dress. The strong current of selfishness in human hearts assumes many aspects as it flows out in feeling and in action. Now it manifests its dark relentlessness of purpose; and now it smiles, and puts on a garb of grace: but it is the same alien spirit still. Was the idolatry of classic days, when temples and statues made its worship beautiful, less truly idolatry than the rude sacrifices of ruder ages and ruder men? or is the self-indulgence, where taste and fashion and art add their charm to the feast, less truly a worship of sense than the coarser sensualities of abandoned passion? Does the decency or the indecency of selfishness create a radical distinction, which places one on the right hand, and the other on the left? Is he undiscriminating who forgets outward differences of action while men's

hearts are one? or is it he who is blinded by these outward differences, and overlooks that moral unity, the central power and sovereign fact in life?

These minor distinctions disappear when Jesus touches our eyes. The classifications of the gospel rest upon everlasting spiritual distinctions. It is something — in some points of view, it is much — to respect right principles in outward action. Still, I detect no vital distinction in character between one man who pursues selfish aims with unremitting steadfastness within the pale of outward honesty and human law, and another, who, stimulated by the same motive, oversteps the bounds of law or honesty; but I see a vital distinction between them both and the moral integrity of the Son of God. I cannot enter into the dispute between the Pharisee and the publican when both are sinners, except to recognize the fact that the apparently greater transgressor, in the humility which his conscious unworthiness inspires, is nearest to the kingdom of heaven. When we stand upon the earth, the varieties upon its surface seem vast indeed. Here are deep valleys, and there are mountains which pierce the clouds; but, could we look down from the skies, the whole would appear as one unbroken level. When we measure men by human standards, the differences between their outward deeds seem to sink some into the depths of degradation, and raise others to the mountain-heights of excellence; but how many of these differences would disappear if we could look down from the judgment-seat! If the great indictment is proved, and Jesus says, "One

thing thou lackest," these individual variations are of minor consequence. Let them be recognized and weighed; but let them not be pleaded for an abatement of the judgment. This man's selfishness never led to such high-handed deeds as have disgraced the publican by his side. What then? Is he, therefore, in fellowship with Jesus? He has not trampled down his conscience in so many ways. What then? Has he not disobeyed that voice of God when besetting passion tempted? What avail controversies respecting shades of ill-desert, when there is a real brotherhood in principle and heart? If the crowd upon the left hand of the Judge should dispute for ages respecting the degree of their individual sinfulness, they would never thus prove themselves worthy to stand among the accepted ones.

When we try the character by the standard which Jesus presents, we look at principles rather than at deeds. This fact explains one phenomenon in deep spiritual experience. We are surprised to hear men, of apparent uprightness, in hours of deeper feeling lament their lingering selfishness and frailty in confessions which only seem appropriate to deeds of shame and crime; we pronounce such language delusion or pretence: but, when man once obtains a clear vision of divine principles, he gains a moral sensitiveness which appears absurd to the slumbering conscience. In the Eastern legend, the real features of the prophet were concealed by a splendid veil, which dazzled every eye; but, when the veil was raised, those who previously worshipped fled in horror.

So it sometimes is with human character. When its deep selfishness and dark traits are veiled, its apparent beauty charms the heart; but, when a keen spiritual insight looks through these outward appearances to the principle of life, the charm is dispelled, and, instead of a form of grace, we behold the features of sin. These deep confessions from sincere lips are not delusions, but tokens of divine tenderness of conscience. The rapture of the saint, and the humiliation of the penitent, are equally mysterious to unspiritual men. Even the heavens are impure to the eye of God; and, when his Spirit comes into the heart of man to judge him, who can speak except with the lowly confession, "Unclean, unclean"?

"One thing thou lackest," said Jesus to the young man, notwithstanding the apparent virtues in his character. And that one defect was vital and overwhelming. The lesson is for every man, and for all ages. We do not always realize that the profound spiritual requisitions which were made in the first days of the Christian faith were everlasting necessities, and not temporary exigencies. We feel that the phrase, "Take up the cross," had a meaning amidst the perils of martyrdoms and crucifixions; but we almost fancy it now to be a figure of speech which has lost its old significance. Yet human nature is unchanged by the changes of ages, — unchanged while heaven and earth pass away. Man's selfishness is as deep, and his will as strong, to-day, as when Jesus spoke in Palestine. There are new helps for sorrowing hearts since Jesus lived and died and rose:

but human affection is still the same unfathomed love; and it requires the same self-crucifying resignation to-day to say, by the side of the tomb, "Thy will be done," as when the sisters of Lazarus went to the grave to weep there. There are new aids to struggling hearts since Jesus vanquished the Tempter, and reached out his hand to save the falling; new influences to save the sinning, since he bled at Calvary: but human nature has lost none of its mighty passions; and it needs the same divine force to bring it under the sway of truth and love, to-day, as when Jesus first said, "Take up the cross." The changes of circumstances, the growth of civilization, neither set aside Christ's requisitions, nor bring men nearer to his divine standard. The passions of Judea and of Rome; the ambition, the pride, the selfishness, the sensuality, of human nature, — still remain in Christendom. New and more damning frauds startle us with every coming day. Pagan hearts beat under Christian vestments. The idol-temples have been overturned, until not one stone is left upon another. No forms of wood or marble or gold seduce men from the worship of the living God; yet the qualities which every idol-deity represented still exist to tempt men, more insidiously, but with equal power. Man has spiritualized both his false and his true worship; and though the temples are overturned, and their gods deserted and despised, still the idol-worship lives. Not one call to profound self-denial, not one deep Christian requisition, has become obsolete, or can become so while man continues to be man.

"Take up the cross," said Jesus to the young man whom he looked upon with love. The doctrine is not essentially affected by the natural graces which men so often possess. Every man, perhaps, has a natural tendency to certain excellences or graces which adorn his character. A natural benevolence or humility or temperance or meekness may be a part of his original spiritual inheritance. All men possess instinctive affections which may build up homes, and endow them with the exhaustless wealth of love. What moral laws each man obeys through the influence of temperament! He may be proud, or even sensual; yet he may have a compassion which is quickly moved for human suffering, and possess a fine instinctive charity. He may be grasping and selfish; yet he may be meek and temperate, little exposed to moral peril from the strength of passion. Dissect the character of each living man, and you will find natural graces as well as natural defects. Some things every man has kept from his youth, even when he lacks the great thing which consecrates and vitalizes all. These natural graces do not modify the grand Christian requisitions. In the first place, this natural goodness is partial, and co-exists with opposite qualities. Man is not to repose upon his inherited tendencies to good: he is to turn to the deep defects of his character, and to strive, by the divine power of a new spirit, to win the missing virtues. The special work may seem to differ in each man's life. In one, the new life is to develop a benevolence which bears the likeness of the Redeemer's love; in another, it is to create a meek-

ness which, when reviled, reviles not again; in another still, it is to hold passion in check, until the law of temperance is enforced upon every limb and member; in all alike, it is to crucify the selfish aim and will. In one sense, each man's peculiar cross may seem different from that which is laid upon every other man; but, in another and a deeper sense, every man must take the same cross, — a cross which it will demand all human energy, strengthened by heavenly grace, to enable him triumphantly to bear.

These natural graces do not modify the Christian requisitions; for, in the second place, they need to be baptized into a new spirit, which will convert them into positive virtues, and clothe them with a heavenly beauty. There is a natural compassion, which brings men together with hurrying feet when the cry of distress pierces their ear. What light it pours into the human countenance! what words of sympathy, what deeds of kindness, it inspires! It is a ray of the divine love in the soul of man, beaming out from the same inspiration which gave him understanding. Man's work is to strive to deepen and glorify that natural grace, until it becomes an omnipresent, sovereign principle, like the tireless benevolence of the Son of God. Then each instinctive ministry of compassion is exercised with new promptitude and devotion; then a profound, self-moving spirit of love gushes up like a living well, and flows out in plans of beneficence that propose the reformation, the redemption, of the world. Christianity ennobles and exalts every true impulse of human nature, every thing

which man deems magnanimous or pure. Every worthy feeling is glorified by the new spirit which Jesus inspires. How beautiful is parental love, that choicest gift of nature, that symbol of the infinite Father's tenderness, even in its natural and instinctive ministries! What all-enduring watchfulness, what self-forgetting devotion, it inspires! But how much more beautiful, how *divine*, it becomes, when it is hallowed by the spirit of the Christ! The natural affection would shield its object from the pain even of a redeeming cross; the spiritual love, in its diviner aims, would inspire a devotion to humanity and truth, even though it must involve a rejection and crucifixion by men. The one is too often animated by earthly fancies and unworthy hopes, notwithstanding its winning grace. It comes with the ambitious prayer, "Grant that these my sons may sit in the seats of power." The other comprehends immortality, eternity, in its thought, and prays that the baptism of Christ may be meekly and bravely borne, if through that path of self-crucifixion the soul may pass on to its ascension. The one fashions silken cords, which bind us to the world; the other creates a divine virtue, which becomes a point of transition opening the way into heaven. Take each noble trait of human nature, take a character in which every such trait exists in its highest beauty, if such a character may be found, and add the inspiration and the grace which the spirit of religion gives, and the change is like that of the transfiguration, when the peasant-dress of Jesus became a robe of eternal light.

The gospel reiterates its ancient sentence, "One thing thou lackest," to every human soul. When man takes up his cross to struggle against the weak and the base things in his character, and labors to develop the features of the life of Jesus where once dwelt selfishness or envy, lust or pride; above all, when he pours the consecration of a new spirit into every noble trait of nature, to give it a deeper meaning and a diviner aim, and to cause it to be "clothed upon" with the life of the Lord from heaven, — then he obeys the Christian law of self-crucifixion, and walks in the steps of the Son of God. There is no consistency, no steadfastness, no security, unless he is controlled by this sovereign spirit of loyalty. The unregenerated heart, like the uncultivated earth, produces thistles and thorns as well as flowers; and the thistles and thorns full often choke the plants of heaven. Without a sovereign, regenerating principle, character becomes the mirror of the world's conventional moralities, and reflects its vices as well as its virtues. What moral delinquencies are explained by this single fact! The unchristianized heart — keeping many of the commandments, perhaps, yet still unchristianized — is borne on by the current of social life whithersoever it flows. So the child of the North, transferred to different scenes, amidst different social influences, brandishes the lash over dilatory slaves, or grasps the pistol of the duellist with murderous hand; but the self-renouncing, Heaven-poised soul is ready to bear the cross of reproach and shame for conscience' sake, and becomes invulnerable to the shafts of temptation or the assaults of the world.

Man is to banish all undiscriminating, superficial moral judgments, and look into himself, and out upon the world, in the clear light of eternal principle. The human heart is the same to-day as when Jesus sent the young man away in sorrow. The world's progress has not eradicated ambition or pride or selfishness, or even sensuality, from human nature. Knowledge may sometimes be laid at the feet of unchristian desire, to become a new instrument by which to accomplish its aims and build up its throne. Circumstances seem to make the path of truth and righteousness more or less difficult in different ages; and yet it can never be more, and never less, difficult to exterminate the selfish will. At one time, the struggle may be amidst perils and crosses before a gazing world; at another, it may be unseen, like that of Jesus in the wilderness. But as the same devotion which overcame the Tempter nerved Jesus to bear the cross up the steep of Calvary; so a like devotion in true souls to-day, amidst an outwardly peaceful life, would wake to heroism, if the old cross could literally be built again. Man is not called to a negative, instinctive excellence, such as nature alone inspires; but to a positive holiness, such as a will, made firm and true by heavenly grace, attains. There is innocence on the face of the child. When I look upon its countenance, I understand why Jesus pointed to it as the image of the spirit which opens the kingdom of God. In its fresh, overflowing sympathies, it dances on, a charm and a joy, in the sight of earth and heaven; but it becomes a diviner being when Jesus takes it in his

arms and blesses it. Perhaps with sharper, or perhaps with gentler, struggles the life of the Son of God may be born; but, without that spiritual birth, it will never become divine. There is a beauty and a peace on the brow of the child, when it stands in the sunshine of human love; but there is a more celestial beauty and a diviner peace on the brow of the man, when his heart is irradiated by the sunshine of the Father's countenance, and borne up by the omnipotence of faith. I know not what strange and tearful expressions may pass over the face, before the charm of innocence will be changed into the glory of holiness. Perhaps the forehead may be bathed with a bloody sweat. Yet man is to strive, nevertheless, to gain the patience and meekness and love, those divine laurels, those godlike virtues, which crowned Him who was lifted up in perfect moral victory. The graces of nature are inconstant, and often give place to lower qualities equally native in the heart. Man is to seek and pray for the divine resolve which holds each sin in check, until it can be rooted out, and which aspires towards a consistency that will clothe him in a garment without a seam. Whatever gift or grace he seems to win, one thing he always lacks, until in earnest consecration he takes up his cross to follow. Then the new central spirit will send new and fresh streams of life into every limb and member, until the new-born child of God attains the stature of a perfect manhood, and wins the moral image of his Lord.

Amidst the revolutions of centuries, amidst the rise and the decays of civilizations, the gospel comes with

two grand messages, which it is the Christian teacher's duty and glory alike to bear. One message never changes. It is the same to-day as when it pierced the conscience by the Jordan's banks; and it involves an experience which, although it appears to vary in men of different temperaments, is essentially the same in all hearts and in all ages. It summons man to recognize a divine law once incarnated in Him who first bore the cross, — a law which is above all human thought and human will and human law, and which is to control the central feeling and the minutest acts of men, as the power of God controls the planets, and directs every grain of dust. Then each new disciple re-establishes in himself the old spirit of allegiance and loyalty which inspired the first apostles, and the confessors who stood against the world. I do not wonder that the word "regeneration" holds a central place in the teaching of Jesus. It means the adoption, for time and for eternity, of the spiritual position which we have so briefly described, and the new life which is then communicated to the human soul. It is not strange that the word is dear to the ear of Christian disciples, and that the truth which it covers is cherished with sleepless vigilance in the heart of Christendom. It is not strange that earnest men shrink from and loathe every superficial teaching which deals with outside moralities, spiritual decencies, and does not transfix the conscience and electrify the heart. They know the need of the new power which the new life bestows to enable them to conquer themselves and to conquer the world. As the

learned teacher and the ignorant Galilean, the Pharisee who gathered his robes close about him, and the sinners who thronged to hear the wonderful Prophet, felt their fancied differences rent away by Christ's discriminations, so men need to feel to-day when the gospel is preached. When the divine word touches the human conscience, men find themselves standing side by side in one common need, as if with united hands; and the same electric shock thrills every breast around the globe. Then genius bows its kingly brow to the dust to share the common penitence, and the knees of monarchs smite together upon their thrones. The gospel has one message which never changes. I listen to it in the past; and, from the days of the first apostles until now, I hear the unbroken succession, the endless chant of voices, responding to its appeals, as new disciples enrolled themselves in the sacramental host, — "I determined not to know any thing save Jesus Christ, and him crucified;" and, as I turn to the future, I catch the words of the same confession coming up in fainter and fainter tones through remoter and still remoter ages, yet clear, distinct, like the strokes of a far-distant bell, and ringing out for evermore the same heavenly melody.

But the same law has another message. It sets up one law; but it is a law which has an infinity of applications. It is to reign at the centre, and reach each point in the circumference, of human action. It is to be like the living heart; and as that sends new energy throughout the system into every limb

and vein, so the new spiritual life diffuses its inspiration through every faculty of the soul, until it baptizes every thought and deed. The old spirit of allegiance undertakes new and varied works of love in the different phases of the world's experience: it will undertake new and varied works through the revolutions of centuries on earth, and through the eternity which awaits us in the heavens. Vast and beneficent moral reformations, the overthrow of social injustice, emancipation from human bondage, are the attendant glories which accompany the progress of Jesus towards his true dominion over the world. Here, in the applications of the great Christian law, we find a message which is as various as the manifestations of human sin and the possibilities of human virtue. Wherever man falters, wherever sin lurks or soars, there the law is to carry its message and its warning; wherever new and divine works can be done, there it is to go with its inspiration. As the gospel unfolds brighter conceptions of the heavenly life, and the redemption which it designs to give, new ideas of duty, new systems of beneficent action, will rise before the mind, as new worlds, and new systems of worlds, beam out before the wondering astronomer when his telescopes open the depths of space. And as it only needs new and more perfect instruments to discover new globes and spheres in the overarching sky; so it only needs a clearer eye and a purer heart to discover new and more godlike ideals for the individual man, and for the race, in the yet unexplored deeps of the word of Jesus; and man

will sooner name all the stars, and exhaust the universe, than number the deeds of love which will be commanded in the complete development of the principle which first enrolls him in the fellowship of true disciples.

We speak of two gospel messages which the teacher is to bear; yet the two are really one: it is but one message in two forms. The disciple, to-day and always, presents one Christ in the infinitely rich and varied applications which the wealth of his life supplies. He can make no applications of the law till its authority be first established. It is as vain to demand Christian duties to-day from those who have not adopted Christian principles, as it would have been to ask an apostolic devotion, in the times of martyrdom, from those who had not first taken up the cross. But the teacher establishes the law *first* for the sake of its *future* applications. He does not attempt to turn the doctrine of the living Christ into a dead generality, and bury Jesus himself in a paralytic faith: he bids faith arise, and walk through the world's dark places, until the wrongs, the oppressions, the stripes, those vices of barbarism nestling close to Christian altars, shall be cast out of Christendom as the money-changers were cast out of the temple which they profaned.

This nominal Christendom becomes a real Christendom, the kingdom of God, wherever this gospel message, which is ever old and ever new, is nobly proclaimed and meekly obeyed. Every administration of truth which modifies it, or blunts its point,

produces a semblance of Christian decency instead of a Christlike regeneration. When men are brought, one by one, to the divine position of loyal discipleship, the way is open for the church to become one. Paul and James and Peter and John, though so different in their individual character, felt the same holy fire of devotion and of love when they stood side by side before the cross, — the symbol alike of the self-renunciation which made them disciples, and of the love by which they were redeemed. Raise men to the same grand level, to be thrilled by the same regenerating life, and, while a thousand minor differences must remain, they will begin to feel, that, though there are "diversities of gifts," there is "the same Spirit," and, though there are "differences of administrations," there is "the same Lord." They will learn to clasp hands who lie on one Master's breast.

Such a ministry of regeneration not only tends to unite the church, but to overcome the world. God's kingdom comes, we say again, as each human soul repeats that old vow of devotion. Thus the foundations are to be laid on which the new Jerusalem of God will hereafter be built among human homes. Each new Christian generation starts from the point to which the preceding one attained, and, borne on by the same principle of allegiance, ascends to a still higher development of Christian thought and life. There are grand cathedrals for Christian worship, which men through many centuries have labored together to build. One generation laid the foundation,

and each succeeding one placed a single course upon the firm and massive walls, until at last they stood complete in beauty, to delight the world for ever. So the nobler temple, which is to be built up in the new life of the race, shall be reared in its divine majesty, at once the glory of all lands and the joy of heaven. Here and everywhere may such a ministry be established. Every lover of truth, every genuine disciple, longs to hear its words of life and peace; every suffering and sinning man, every fettered slave, waits for its words of power and love; and the saints of all ages, and the overshadowing Spirit, will crown it with eternal benedictions.

RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP;

DELIVERED AT THE

ORDINATION OF REV. ALFRED PORTER PUTNAM,

DEC. 19, 1855,

BY REV. J. H. PHIPPS.

IN the name of the churches here represented, I am commissioned, my brother, to extend to you the hand of fellowship; and, although this act may not signify precisely what it once did, it is still an appropriate expression of the feelings that belong to this occasion; and, consequently, it is something more and better than an empty ceremony. It tells you, that, from this time forth, you are to stand here a recognized minister of Christ: it tells you that you are received into the company and fellowship of that brotherhood whose peculiar privilege it is to preach the salvation and the consolations of the gospel: it represents the confidence that is felt in your integrity, and in your fitness for the vocation you have chosen, the interest that is cherished in your behalf, and which has assembled so goodly a company to witness these solemnities to-day; the prayers that are offered, and that will continue to be offered, that you may be a successful preacher of the word of God: it represents the pledge we make to you, as members of the church of Christ and as ministers of his truth, that, amid all the trials and difficulties of your ministry, we will not be unmindful of your welfare, but will cherish you in our hearts as a brother in Christ. So understanding this right hand of fellowship, I extend it to you with the utmost cordiality and good faith; and I beg you to accept it as the symbol of the friendliness and sympathy that are entertained toward you by all in whose behalf it is given; accept it as the most expressive token we can give you of the sense we have of

your desire to be a true and faithful worker in the Lord's vineyard; accept it as the expression of the pleasure we feel in ordaining you to the responsible and honorable office of a minister of Christ; for, notwithstanding all that may be said or thought in disparagement of the ministerial office in these times, it is a high privilege to be permitted to discharge its functions; and therefore it is with unfeigned satisfaction that I greet you at the commencement of your new career, and hail you as a fellow-laborer in the ministry of the gospel. Gladly do we open our hearts to you as to a brother worthy of our respect and sympathy, and bid you welcome to the noblest of callings.

True, the ministry has its difficulties and discouragements; and I would not disguise from you this fact, as I believe you have not disguised it from yourself: but believing, as I do, that you are resolved patiently to encounter whatever discouragements may attend your ministry, that you are willing to bear whatever burdens and to make whatever sacrifices your position may require, — if so be you can extend a little the empire of Christian truth and charity, — I offer you a hearty welcome; not doubting that the work to which you have been set apart will prosper in your hands. I welcome you to its opportunities and responsibilities, — and they are many and great; I welcome you to the prerogative — it belongs to your office, and no human argument can invalidate it — of a discreet and conscientious utterance of Christian truth, in its application to all iniquitous customs and to all inhuman institutions; I welcome you to the bearing of consolatory messages to the homes of the afflicted and to the chambers of the dying; I welcome you to the privilege of preaching Christ the authority, the necessity of regeneration, and the blessedness of the heavenly life.

And, while offering you this welcome, I hazard nothing in saying that this occasion is regarded by the Christian community to which you belong with entire satisfaction; and, although the expression of this feeling may never reach you, it must be an encouragement to know that it exists.

To those of us who have known you long and well; who have witnessed your perseverance in the preparation for the position you have this day assumed; who know how deeply you desire to banish all secular purposes, all unworthy ambition, all that can militate against earnestness and simplicity, and to be a useful minister of Christ in the sphere to which you have been called, — it is an occa-

sion of great interest and of sincere gratitude to Him who has brought you, restored in health and strength, unto this auspicious day.

To yourself, while it is an occasion of gladness, it must also be one of sadness. So much of life is crowded into this brief hour, that it can scarcely be otherwise than solemn and affecting. With it, the season of preparation ends; with it, the period of actual responsible service begins. The work to which you have looked forward with pleasing expectations has become a present and a grave reality. The misgivings, which, years ago, threatened to confine you to the more alluring sphere of worldly endeavor, have been laid aside by the influence of a Christian purpose, and by the persuasions of one * whose memory is as precious to those who knew him in life as his death was unexpected and afflicting. Obstacles that seemed insurmountable have, one by one, been vanquished; and now, the hopes of years fulfilled, you are entering upon the long contemplated field of labor and responsibility; and though a united society are waiting for your ministrations, and all things give augury of a prosperous and useful career, it is easy to imagine that this is an hour in your experience of unusual solicitude and sadness. Not unlikely, in view of what you have witnessed and heard of the difficulties and labors and trials of the ministerial profession, you may be almost ready to question your sufficiency for these things. That at such a season as this you should experience something of solicitude and self-distrust, is natural, and to be expected. However this may be, you certainly have no good cause for discouragement. Taking your place here, with an earnest desire to be guided in all things by that wisdom which cometh by prayer, with sympathies that no form of human suffering will ever appeal to in vain, with a determination to labor in all legitimate ways for the advancement of your people in Christian knowledge and holiness, you are secure, at least, against that failure which brings with it dishonor and self-reproach. Cherishing such desires and purposes; looking upon your position not as one of mere official dignity, but as furnishing opportunities for bringing souls unto Christ, — opportunities that cannot consistently be neglected for any other pursuits, however agreeable; holding yourself in readiness to do every thing that Heaven shall give you power to do for the further-

* Israel Alden Putnam.

ance of the truth as it is in Jesus, — you may safely leave the issue with God. Moreover, you will be assisted in your efforts by the counsel and support of others. It will certainly be strange, if, among the people of your charge, there are not some earnest Christian men and women who will co-operate with you in every good work, who will generously appreciate your endeavors in their behalf, whose sympathizing and approving looks will inspire you with confidence in many a season of distrust and trial. Above and beyond all, in every difficult exigency needful strength will be obtained from Him who has called you to be a servant in the church of his Son; and, in the hour when most painfully conscious of your incompetency for the task in hand, assistance will be given you, so that at no time will you be destitute of some word of instruction or warning or exhortation wherewith to urge your people forward toward the heavenly state.

And so I welcome you, once more, to this inspiring field of duty, in the hope that you will not grow weary or disheartened as the novelty of your position wears away, but that, amid all discouragements and defeats, you may, through Christ assisting you, maintain a courageous and tranquil mind. May happiness be vouchsafed to you in such measures as are consistent with your ministerial usefulness and with your progress in the Christian life; may every reasonable expectation which this occasion inspires be fulfilled; through your exertions, may many souls be converted to God; may humanity and faith, Christian piety and righteousness, increase abundantly under your ministry; and as year after year rolls over your head, and the enthusiasm of youth declines, may you be cheered and sustained by a constant and ever-growing sense of the dignity and blessedness of being a co-worker with Christ for the establishment of the kingdom of God; to whose paternal favor and guidance I devoutly commend you, until that day when all your earthly labors shall be ended, and this mortal shall put on immortality.

Order of Services

AT THE

ORDINATION OF MR. ALFRED P. PUTNAM,

AS PASTOR OF THE

MT. PLEASANT CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH AND SOCIETY

IN ROXBURY,

ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1855.

I. ANTHEM.

II. INVOCATION.

REV. A. R. POPE.

III. SELECTIONS FROM SCRIPTURE.

REV. GRINDALL REYNOLDS.

IV. ORIGINAL HYMN.

BY MR. LEWIS G. PRAY.

AROUND thine altar, Lord, this day,
Thy people here their homage pay,—
Would seek thy grace, thy love review,
As they thy mercies taste anew.

Lord, thou hast sent thy servant here;
His purpose let thy presence cheer,
As, bending low and reverent, he
Devotes his powers, himself, to thee.

O Father! grant him from above
Thine aid to speak the truth in love;
So may his words like dew distil,
And every heart with blessings fill.

Lord, help him, when Christ's feast is spread,
To break with holy peace its bread;
And send him forth, with shepherd's crook,
To lead the lambs by Kedron's brook.

As varied scenes his powers shall try,
Lord, with thine aid be ever nigh,—
His people's love, a cheering light,
And thou his strength in death's dark night.

V. SERMON.

REV. GEORGE W. BRIGGS, D.D.

VI. PRAYER OF ORDINATION.

REV. CHANDLER ROBBINS, D.D.

VII. HYMN.

(SELECTED.)

O LORD of life and truth and grace,
Ere nature was begun!
Make welcome to our erring race
Thy Spirit and thy Son.

We hail the church, built high o'er all
The heathen's rage and scoff;
Thy providence its fenced wall,
"The Lamb the light thereof."

Thy Christ hath reached his heavenly seat
Through sorrows and through scars;
The golden lamps are at his feet,
And in his hands the stars.

Oh! may he walk among us here
With his rebuke and love,—
A brightness o'er this lower sphere,
A ray from worlds above.

VIII. CHARGE TO THE PASTOR.

REV. JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE.

IX. RIGHT HAND OF FELLOWSHIP.

REV. J. H. PHIPPS.

X. ANTHEM.

XI. ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE.

REV. F. D. HUNTINGTON, D.D.

XII. CONCLUDING PRAYER.

REV. GEORGE PUTNAM, D.D.

XIII. DOXOLOGY.

FROM all that dwell below the skies
Let the Creator's praise arise;
Let the Redeemer's name be sung,
Through every land, by every tongue.

Eternal are thy mercies, Lord;
Eternal truth attends thy word:
Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore,
Till suns shall rise and set no more.

XIV. BENEDICTION.

BY THE PASTOR.

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